

The Pathway to a New Facility – A Proposed Timeline

Richard Sims, Director Montana Historical Society

Prologue: MHS Board of Trustees approved motion January 2007: "The director is instructed to continue aggressive pursuit of purchase of the Capital Hill Mall as a site for facility expansion, and is further instructed to investigate alternative sites near the State Capitol Building, as a conservative and prudent use of public funds."

July 1, 2005: Legislature approves \$7.5 million bonding authority and \$30 million fundraising authority for much needed major facility. Bill does not specify a site. However, the Capitol Hill Mall owners had previously approached the Society with a proposal to sell the complex for a new building, and that becomes focus of the discussion.

July – November, 2005: On a parallel track, the departure of the former director takes place during a period when due diligence inspections on the mall property begin.

December 2005 – July 2006: A national search is conducted for a new Society director. Meanwhile, a new Society Board of Trustees president takes office, along with new board members. Society officials meet with members of the Governor's office that results in a "site-neutral" position proposed by the governor and accepted by all. It is agreed that a new director be hired before settling on a site. Enthusiasm for a new Society building and site remains high among all officials. The governor names a liaison.

May 2006: Society officials and interim director meet with Department of Administration officials to discuss results of the due diligence process and two separate appraisals of the mall property done by the owners and for the state. There are significant problems found with the existing mall structure as well as some clear title issues on the land. The appraisals exchanged between the state and the owners are roughly the same at about \$10 million. However, several issues would have to be settled before any sale could take place, one being the nine acres of leased land under the mall. State can't make improvements on leased land.

July 1, 2006: The new Society director reports. There is concern among some board members and others that expansion of the Society has not been discussed enough outside of the Capitol City area. Trustees want all of Montana to participate in imagining the future of their institution.

August, 2006: Governor's Budget Director approves \$20,000 for "Conversations with Montana," a program that is basically a listening tour to understand what non-Helenans want to see in a new Society facility. Director Richard Sims goes on the road.

September, 2006: At quarterly meeting of the Society board, by unanimous vote, the director is charged with maintaining a site-neutral position for expansion, continuing to hold meetings about the Society's future in towns across the state, and with procuring funding to begin architectural services for master planning and final site selection. The trustees recognize that questions will be raised about the progress of the project and the fact that the funds have not been spent, but trust that the Legislature will recognize that they and new director, are striving to make sure that the decisions will be fiscally sound and meet the needs of Montana history and heritage for the next 50 or more years.

October 23, 2006: A two-hour meeting with representatives of Capitol Hill Mall is inconclusive. Negotiations left open.

November, 2006: Budget Director approves up to \$250,000 of the \$7.5 million for architectural services leading to facility expansion. The bids will be issued in late January, with an architect firm selected by April, 2007.

(NOTE: During the past six months with the new director on board, progress has been made in three areas: 1. State-wide planning through "Conversations with Montana." 2. Resources to recruit an architect firm to begin the planning and design process. 3. New relationship forged with fundraising partner, the Montana History Foundation.)

The Remainder of 2007

March – October: Master Planning process will be conducted by an architect firm, with scope of work that includes needs assessment of each program and each position, square footage projections, adjacency analysis for internal efficiencies and increased public service, and site selection. This includes site plans, floor plans, illustrations, exhibitions and visitor amenities, an architectural model, cost estimates for phased construction and/or renovation, and other products that assist with continued planning and fundraising.

March – October: Concurrent with master plan work by outside firm is **Business Plan** development by staff and board, to project revenues and expenses associated with operations in a new facility(s), with a goal of sustainability. The plan will assume a phased occupancy/re-occupancy of existing/new facility(s).

August – October: A **Feasibility Study** will be conducted to determine an achievable goal for fundraising. This is a state-wide study conducted by experts in the fundraising profession, who conduct confidential interviews with major philanthropists.

August – October: Concurrent with feasibility study, a **Plan of Campaign** will be drafted, in concert with the Montana History Foundation, which addresses both bricks and mortar and an endowment.

September: Architect team will make a presentation to board and staff of finalized master plan, including proposed site for new facility. Board takes action on this plan by approving or approving as modified. A property purchase committee is formed, to begin addressing real estate issues of selected site, and to examine any possible partnerships with entities in the public and private sectors.

October – December: A campaign cabinet will be formed, consisting of influential philanthropists and leaders around the state, a chair or co-chairs will be selected (former governors, for instance) and a "Society to Match the Scenery" campaign will be launched, with six-figure leadership gifts to set the pace. All of 2008 and 2009 will be taken up by fundraising, with ground broken for new facility in mid-2009.